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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses suggested requirements for a competency-based English teacher training program on the high school or college level. The author argues that an English teacher needs to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the subject matter in three areas: the structure and history of the English language, rhetorical theory and practice, and literature and criticism. Equally important measures of competence, however, are the kinds of actions he performs in teaching, the skills he possesses as a teacher, and the strategies he uses in organizing these skills. The author outlines a model specifying what some of these competencies in subject matter, acts, skills, and strategies might be. He also suggests that teaching competencies should include certain values, attitudes, and experiences that are not as measurable as the other competencies, but that are no less necessary for competence to be achieved. Once definitions of these competencies are made, it is argued, an exciting, rigorous, and intellectually stimulating teacher training program can be established. (Author/DI)

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COMPETENCIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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The idea of competence in teaching and training is both new and not new. People have long said, "He's a great teacher," or "She can't teach." These intuitive judgments, based on observation of people in the act of teaching or memory of classes in which one has been, goes on every day. What is new in the 1970's is the possibility that one can systematically, if not scientifically, define the attributes of a good or bad teacher and to develop criteria for competence and thus guidelines for teacher education. As education began to develop as a separate field from its parent disciplines of philosophy and psychology, so people began to look at the act of teaching from a philosophic or a social scientific point of view. From this series of studies emerged ways of looking at the logic or rhetoric of teaching and ways of looking at teacher-pupil interaction.

An obvious next step was the exploration of that most important matter, the relationship between various acts of the teacher and the behavior or learning of the student. If relationship and causality could be determined, then a science of teaching could begin to emerge. If no causality exists, then the actions of a teacher--or the teacher's rhetorical strategies--are independent of their intended effects. Most of the research in the nexus of teaching and learning has been reviewed by Barak Rosenshine, who concludes that little save such generalities as broad knowledge, openness, variety, have an effect on student achievement. At this point there is virtually no empirical evidence about the efficacy of any teaching act or strategy as it might affect student learning. To determine the criteria for a good teacher, or the competencies involved in teaching the language arts, then, one must look to authority, opinion, and introspection; all time-honored determinants of what should be done. After all, they are what we have been relying on for generations.

A competent teacher, we might say, is first of all one that knows the subject to be taught. A teacher of English must have a knowledge of the English language--its structure and its history. Second would come a knowledge of rhetorical theory and practice--both oral and written rhetoric. Third would come a knowledge of literature and of criticism. These three areas form the tripod with which we are all so familiar. The limits of knowledge in each of these areas seem infinite; minimal knowledges for teaching must be arbitrarily defined. Recent surveys like the English Teacher Preparation Guidelines and the Illinois State-Wide Curriculum project in English Teacher Preparation both set forth minimal levels of preparation in these subjects: knowledge of structural, traditional, and transformational grammars; knowledge of Aristotelian and Platonic rhetorics; knowledge of the sweep of British and American literature; knowledge of "new" and thematic criticism. Certainly all of these knowledges are important, although specifics within these broad areas become difficult to determine. In literature, it is important for a prospective teacher to have a working knowledge of popular literature and of adolescent literature, as well as of the literature of the ethnic and regional minorities. In rhetoric, it would be useful for a student to be aware of the rhetorics of Ken Macrorie and of James Moffett, since both are used in the schools. In language, it is important for a student to have a knowledge of dialectology, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, as well as a command of traditional grammar sufficient to cope with Warriner and with school boards, of transformational grammar sufficient to deal with the textbooks of Paul Roberts and Owen Thomas, and of structural grammar sufficient to undertake contrastive analysis of the students' dialects and what-

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ever passes for "standard."

If I seem to be placing a premium on knowledge and prescribing a curriculum suitable for a PhD, it is for a reason. I have noticed that teachers--both prospective and working teachers--have to cope with all these matters, yet they haven't as much at their fingertips as they should have and they do not have a means of acquiting the knowledge that they need. So they avoid teaching their students language, composition, and an appropriate strategy of response. Many of the content courses do not give the teacher the concepts about the subject that are powerful, or if they present those courses they do so in a way that details take on greater meaning than the concept itself. In language, the concept of deep and surface structure is probably one of the most powerful, but too few texts and classes allow the college student to worry that concept. Phrase structure rules become the important matters. Courses in literature seldom prepare the student to deal critically with a new work, and none go into the reasons for approaching literature in a particular way or into a conscious examination of critical strategies. I have noticed that current lists of competencies tend to list trivia or test items rather than the concepts those items measure. This act perpetuates the inanity of most catalogues of behavioral objectives. English courses do allow students to act like English student-scholars--to perform critical and historical research, but they do not provide students with the metatheary that is going to help them determine why they do what they do. The metaconcepts of language, literature, and rhetoric are important for they can enable a student to move into new material--a new textbook, a mini-course framework, or an open or closed teaching situation with a certain degree of confidence. I should stress here that to say that a teacher should have all of this knowledge is <u>not</u> to say that the teacher will impart that knowledge to students. A teacher must know more than will be spewed forth in a class or a unit. Thus, and only thus, can a teacher understand that which students do and why they do it.

A second set of concepts that a teacher should have at command are those dealing with learning and development, particularly as learning and development are related to the mother tongue. Concepts of learning come, of course, from the theories of Piaget, Erickson, and others, but those general concepts must be seen in the context of language learning not as vague theory. It is for that reason that one might well set forth a series of competencies based on the ability of prospective teachers to observe students in the process of behaving and to determine what operations they are performing with respect to the mother tongue. In language, one should be able to look at the developmental indices set forth by Carol Chomsky, Kenneth Goodman, and others, as they are illustrated in the talk or writing of children. In rhetoric, one needs to be able to make a rhetorical analysis of a student essay, not simply to grade it. In literature, one needs to be able to describe the critical stance taken by a student in a classroom discussion. A prospective teacher, then, should have the ability to observe the linguistic behavior of people at various levels and should be able to analyze that behavior. It is this observing and analytic ability that enables a teacher to make effective judgments about students' strengths and weaknesses, about how what a student is currently doing may be related to what that student could do. Instead of expecting a ninth grader to write a critical analysis of "After Apple-Picking" like the critical analysis the teacher wrote in college, the teacher might see how the ninth-grader acts <u>when he is acting like a ninth-grader</u>.

Learning theory as it is embodied in behavior with respect to the mother-tongue is but a subset of general learning theory, one of the foundation knowledges that a prospective teacher should have. But as I have suggested that in subject matter the prospective teacher has no sense of the forest because all of

college instruction deals with trees and how to deal with trees, so in the educational foundations courses, most prospective teachers get an overview and do not see how the overview relates to students with whom one is dealing in English courses. The teacher should, I would suggest, learn to perform the operations of the learning researcher and the educational psychologist or educational anthropologist. Competence in observing, recording, analyzing and interpreting behavior in the various facets of English would enable the teacher to function better as a diagnostician in the school and in the classroom. One national program that has been underway for the past three years is the Protocol Program under the EPDA branch of the United States Office of Education. This program, using the services of people in universities across the country, has been producing materials for teacher training: films, videotapes, audio tapes, that help a student isolate an instance of a concept (such as "shared nomenclature" in language learning, or "positive reinforcement" in teaching strategy, or "sociological interpretation" in a classroom discussion of literature), identify the ways in which the concept is being used, and interpret the actions of students or the teachers in the light of the conceptual framework. Skill with dealing with these concepts not in the abstract, but as they are being enacted in the behavior of people is important. Of course the test of whether the prospective teacher can understand the concept is to have the teacher observe or participate in an actual class and see whether he can isolate the concept amid all the other things that are happening.

If having mastery of the master concepts in the mother-tongue and the learning of the mother-tongue were all, the task of training for competence and certifying competence would be relatively easy. The problem would entail defining what these concepts were and seeing the extent to which the teacher mastered them, whether he could define them, whether he could give instances of them, whether he could perceive those concepts in the behavior of others--both fictional behavior and real behavior, in both laboratory and actual surroundings.

But such mastery is not all; although we have no proof that specific acts and skills directly contribute to the learning of children, we assume that the ability to present material, to talk clearly, to ask questions, to know how to praise, to follow a logical sequence, to select appropriate activities to introduce, explain, and extend learning: these and a number of other skills are signs of a teacher.

We can first say that there are certain acts that prospective teachers can perform. Some of these would be related to the construction of learning incidents: the teacher should be able to prepare instructional objectives, to find materials, to interpret diagnostic measures, to write out lesson plans, to construct assignments for classwork and for homework, to create a series of brief filler assignments for blank spaces in the day or week, to construct evaluation tasks, create motivational strategies and plays, and many more.

A second set of acts is related to what goes on in the classroom. The teacher should be able to ask questions so as to elicit answers exhibiting both the lower and the higher mental processes, to analyze the responses of students and be able to answer the students questions in the terms that they ask them, to be able to use positive reinforcement, to discipline misbehaving students, to encourage reticent ones, to locate places where students seem to be lost, to switch to an alternate instructional mode when the students do not understand, to deliver clear explanations, and to admit ignorance.

A third set of acts would refer to post-teaching activities: rating papers, marking and correcting, giving grades, counselling, tutoring, making up tests, providing means for students to evaluate the instruction and the course. Another set of acts would refer to the extra-instructional activities of the teacher: relations with fellow teachers, with administrators, with parents and citizens groups, with professional organizations.

All of these and many more constitute the professional acts of the teacher. Such acts may be dissociated from the subject matter that the teacher teaches: principles and acts in test construction or questioning exist apart from English or mathematics. In most cases, however, the subject matter acts to modify any general definition of the teaching act, and one should set subject-specific competencies and criteria.

But competency implies not merely the capacity to perform those strategies. The acts can be performed with greater or less skill. A teacher might make a better or a poorer test, might judge an essay more or less consistently and fairly, ask questions with more or less aplomb. The judge of skill in most cases is a master teacher or a professor, a person who acts as a judge at a diving contest, and seems able to give a 7 or a 5 on the basis of informed and respected opinion. No two judges will give the exact same opinion, but most observers of teaching find they can spot the adroit questioner or the able item-writer. Definitions of level of skill, then, must include referance to the judgment of an observer.

But acts and skill at performing acts are not all. The acts must fit into a pattern, a strategy of teaching. The questions must appear in a sequence and be related to activities and to rewards and responses. The test should follow from the objectives, and the grades should follow from the tests and the objectives. The sequencing of learning activities into a meaningful pattern for a group of slow students may differ from the sequencing for an able group. Both the sequencing itself and the distinction between sequences according to groups of students constitute strategies that a teacher must acquire.

Concepts, teaching acts, skills, strategies: these seem to be the components of a competency-based teacher education program. These components can be fitted into a model of proficiency moving from the ability to recognize or define the act, say, to being able to do it in a real teaching situation, to becoming adept at it to the extent of being able to teach it to others. In this model each stage serves as a measure of the efficacy of the preceding stage and indicates a curricular strategy. I would say indicates only because there is an immense flaw in the notion that learning to name a thing precedes doing it. Our knowledge of the development of language ability and its relation to linguistic terminology or formal grammar would belie that notion. So too would the sense of all of us that knowledge does not become significant until it is needed. If one is to build a curricular strategy on an idea of competency, one must interweave practice, book learning, observation, and simulation.

What I have said so far suggests that the process of defining competencies is both an immensely complex task and an arbitrary one. It is complex, for one must determine the level of specificity at which one will operate, the degree of atomism one wishes to undergo. I would urge that atomism be reserved for test constructors, not for program builders. It is arbitrary, for out of all the potential components of a competency-based system, one must assert that certain components are more important than others, that certain acts are more

desired than others, that certain strategies are better than others. These assertions cannot be supported empirically now; they probably cannot be and I am unsure that they should be. One must make do with whatever wisdom and lore one has acquired.

Having been somewhat general and magesterial, I shall become arbitrary in my summary, and set forth a model. I would argue that the concepts one needs to

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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have about literature in order to teach in general education would deal with the root aesthetic concepts: voice or character, shape, and metaphor. These three general concepts appear to permeate literature of whatever type; they are the aesthetic concepts upon which a spiral curriculum could be constructed. A second set of concepts would deal with the major thematic constructs of literature; and here I would turn to Northrop Frye or to the Freudians as being the best delineators of these concepts. Third would come a set of concepts related to reading competence--decoding, hypothesis testing, the relation of rate to retention, and comprehension among others. The fourth set would deal with the literary response, what its nature is, how it may be defined, how it appears at different stages and following different types of works, what are the categories of interest on the part of young people, and what sorts of works are interesting and appealing to different groups. These four sets of concepts would involve much reading, both of the literature of the high culture and that of popular culture; as well as viewing of films and television which might be said to be different manifestations of the literary experience. They would involve observation of people's responses in differing kinds of situations and expressions--talk papers, collages, dramatic readings, and the like.

The concepts about language and the generation of rhetorical utterances or composition would similarly be grouped under root concepts: syntactics, semantics, rhetoric, and the generating process (including dialect, language development, and the composing processes that children actually use). In both cases the concern is not merely with what people should be--with the ideal critic or reader or with the ideal writer or rhetor but, and more importantly, with what people are at various stages in their lives and in various parts of the society.

To turn from subject to pedagogy, concepts dealing with education and society, with learning theory, with measurement and evaluation, for me assume power. Some concepts dealing with teaching and counselling assume a lesser power--concepts such as those dealing with the nature of questioning, with the nature of feedback and teacher-pupil interaction. I would concentrate on some concepts dealing with the functions of school in our society, with cognitive and affective development, with motivation, with objectives and measurement of objectives. Other clusters might depend upon these, and I would certainly advocate an open exploration between subject matter person and educationist. It is in the derivation of these concepts and the relating of them to the teacher-training program that a wedding of the two schools might finally take place.

From concept to act and strategies: there are acts related to observation and analysis, acts related to planning, acts related to classroom interaction, acts related to evaluation, and acts related to professional relations. These five rubrics might operate as a first point for deriving a list of competencies.

A TENTATIVE MODEL FOR PLANNING COMPETENCY-BASED INSTRUCTION AND CERTIFICATION

A.C.PURVES

	EXEMPLIFICATIONS			
	Definition & Recognition	Interpretation	Laboratory Enactment	Actual Instructi Enactment ion
CONCEPTS				
Literature				
Aesthetics				
Thematics				
Reading Competence				
Response				
Languages(Verbal & Non-Verbal)				
Phonetics & Morphemics				
Semantics				
Syntactics				
Rhetoric				
Generating Processes				
Education and Society				
Learning Theory				
Motivation				
Measurement and Evaluation				
ACTS				
Observation and Analysis				
Planning				
Interaction				
Evaluation				
Professional Relations				
STRATEGIES				
Relationships				
Sequencing				
ATTITUDES AND VALUES				

Strategies would be the sequencing and relating of acts to one another and of acts to concepts. They would involve the construction of a learning unit, with rationale, objectives, material, structure, and evaluation. They would involve the conducting of large-group discussions and lessons, of conducting small-group activities and instruction, and of working out individualized programs. They might include the sequencing of materials--film, reading, dramatics, records--into a meaningful whole.

So far we have dealt with cognitive matters; certainly the competencies of a teacher include attitudes and values. They would include a sense of inquisitiveness about people, an interest in people and education, a sense of responsibility to the individual and to society, a sensitivity to human differences, both group and individual. I will not here taxonomize those values, mainly because I have some trouble in doing so without sounding like a proponent of the Christian ethic. Certainly a competency-based system must seek to determine what the values and attitudes of a prospective teacher are and whether they seem appropriate to the certifying group's best sense of the profession; whether these values can be inculcated is doubtful.

Having sought to define some competencies that I think valuable, I would conclude by considering the value of the exercise I have gone through. First it has enabled me to think about the profession and what a professional is. Second, it has caused me to think that were a certification group to be developed in a department, that group would be freed to consider ways of allowing students to master those competencies and to present themselves to the certifying agent. As certifiers, they can probably not be much more specific than I have been. Many writers have well pointed out the dangers of over-specification and trivialization. I can only urge that others heed that warning. As curriculum builders, however, the group might seize upon the idea that many of the competencies could be acquired through a course, many through independent work and tutorial systems, many through short-courses, intensive courses, and the like. A department could restructure its offerings in terms of modules or learning sequences, could allow students to pace themselves in a variety of ways, could allow for experimentation in course offering. A course could be presented in two weeks; the student doing nothing else but that course. Films and television, and computer-based education could be fitted into the total program of a department. Faculty could be given the responsibility for instruction and certification, but need not be bound to a three-day-a-week, hour-a-day, for fifteen week routine.

Third, by what I have omitted, I find that there are certain things that I think important for teacher training that have nothing to do with competence. These are experiences that I think it important for the teacher to have because they are valuable intrinsically, or because the profession places value on them. Among these are actual classroom experiences as an observer, as an assistant, and as an autonomous teacher. All of these could be simulated, but lore and experience tell me that simulation is not the same thing as real-life experience. I would say that a teacher should have the experience of exploring a community and finding out all that can be found out about it. One should have the experience of being videotaped as a teacher and observing and analyzing one's own behavior. One should participate in both formal and informal dramatic activities. One should participate in a seminar concerned with the problems of the profession. All of these experiences are, I think, worthwhile. Can I prove their value? I doubt it. Yet I should imagine that most people would agree with me, both teacher-trainers and teachers who have had some of these experiences. I think there need be no other justification for these experiences. There need be no behavioral outcomes; there need be no levels of performance. These are

simply experiences to be undergone for their own sakes.

In building a competency-based program, then, I would suggest that one seek strenuously and rigorously to define the concepts, acts, levels of skill, and strategies that a prospective teacher should be responsible for; I would add to that a set of values and attitudes that a teacher should manifest, and I would set forth a series of experiences that are deemed necessary as part of the certification process. Once these definitions are made, the possibilities for making the teacher-training program exciting, intellectual stimulating, and rigorous seem limited only by the imagination of the faculty and the flexibility of the institution.